

3 Powerful Taoist Meditation Techniques to Tame the Mind, Open the Heart and Awaken Intuitive Abilities

BY SOLALA TOWLER



master spiritual teachers have used taoist meditation techniques for thousands of years as a gateway to higher consciousness, health and peace of mind. photo: issara willenskomer

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If we want to have a healthy and harmonious relationship with another, we need to also have a healthy and harmonious relationship with ourselves, which is most easily created by practicing the Taoist

meditation techniques outlined in this article. If we are not centered, not grounded, not trustworthy, then we will not be trusted by another. If we are unhealthy, too self-absorbed, or emotionally unbalanced, then we will not attract a healthy and balanced partner. If we do not know ourselves, we

will not be able to know another. And lastly, if we are not developed spiritually, then the challenges of relationship will be too much for us, and we will never be able to achieve sacred union with another.

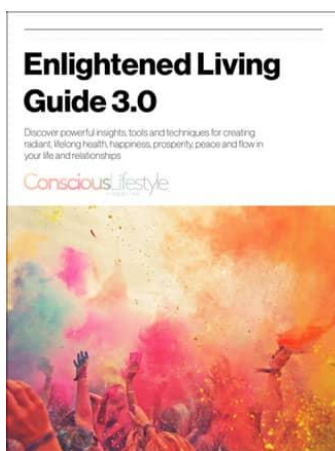
By practicing Taoist meditation, synonymous with Daoist meditation, we will become more grounded and emotionally and spiritually balanced. Meditation, both formal and informal, will give us valuable tools to use in stressful times. And because meditation is the practice of connecting to and communing with our higher or spiritual self, it will help us to be more objective in our relationships of all types.

Taoist meditation helps us to calm our mind and our emotions so we do not overreact to every bump in the road. Hua-Ching Ni says in his book 8,000 Years of Wisdom, “Usually something unimportant stimulates an emotional response, and then one unconsciously emphasizes the trouble to support being emotional.”

Taoist meditation is often called “Embracing the One” or “Returning to the Source.” There is much about it that is mystical and may at first seem hard to understand for the beginner. It is different from many other forms of Eastern meditation practices because it emphasizes energy practice over mind practice. True, we do use the mind to guide the chi, or internal energy, to quiet the emotions, and to let go of all outside influences — those “external pernicious influences” that stir up the mud of our inner selves. But even when we are sitting still doing nothing (ching-jingwuwei), we are still running energy throughout our body or in what is known as the microcosmic orbit (up the back and down the front) or cooking up healing medicine in the cauldron of our lower dantian.

Most Taoist meditation techniques centers on the lower dantian; however, it is interesting to note that women are often taught to instead put their focus on the middle dantian, the point between the breasts, just above the solar plexus. This point is connected to the heart center, where the shen resides. It is felt that, because of the superior spiritual nature of women, they do not need to do quite so much of the basic foundational energetic work as men do.

From the outside, the meditating individual appears to be sitting quietly, breathing deeply and gently, with a small half smile on his or her lips. On the inside, however, great forces are at work, reshaping and rerouting streams of energy and light. This internal healing energy then begins reshaping the outside. Not only do regular Taoist meditators begin to feel different, they often even look different to others. Worry lines and wrinkles begin to relax and disappear; the body, especially the spine, begins to realign itself and the Taoist meditator’s posture changes. The ability to deal with life’s challenges and pressures improves dramatically, and so one’s entire disposition changes accordingly.



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The internal changes of mastering the Taoist meditation techniques are even more dramatic. A greater sense of clarity, both emotional and psychological, begins to suffuse one's being. As chi pathways begin to unblock and the internal energy of one's body begins to travel more easily and powerfully through one's being, old illnesses and old problems begin to lighten, if not disappear entirely.

Just how does one enter into this state of absolute quiescence, where the chi can do its work? Lao Tzu says:

*“Abide in stillness.
The ten thousand beings rise and flourish
While the sage watches their return.
Though all beings exist in profusion
They all end up returning to their source.
Returning to their source is called tranquility.”*
(Chapter 16)

Another traditional name for Tao meditation is “Abiding in Stillness.” Lao Tzu gives us the following advice on stillness practice:

*“Go within and retreat from the world.
Blunt your sharpness,
separate your entanglements,
soften your light.”*
(Chapter 56)

Preparation of the Body: Basic Meditation Posture

Most people in the West have a difficult time sitting still. They fidget, stretch, make noises, sway back and forth, changing posture over and over. Yet it is impossible to attain inner stillness without first attaining outer stillness. The very first prerequisite for attaining the deep levels of inner stillness and quietude needed for doing deep Tao meditation techniques is being able to sit with the spine straight for at least twenty minutes at a time.

Because Daoist meditation is so difficult for many beginners, the best thing to do is start with a small amount of time — say five minutes. After a time, you can extend that period until you can sit for twenty to thirty minutes at a stretch without having to change posture or move around. Twenty or thirty minutes of tao meditation practice at a time is sufficient for most people. If your goal is to heal a serious health problem or to become an immortal, then much longer periods of sitting will be necessary, but for most people a shorter period will do just fine. Taoist meditators don't really advocate long uninterrupted hours of sitting for most people. Sitting for a long time is said to cause the inner energy to stagnate in the organs and can actually do more harm than good. I was once told by one of my teachers that too much sitting will make your teeth fall out.

You can sit on the floor with your legs crossed or if you can manage it, in the cross-legged position known as half or full lotus. Or else you can sit on the edge of a chair with your feet flat on the floor.

Your hands lie in your lap. You can have the left hand lying in your right palm, with the tips of the thumbs touching. Or you can lay your right thumb in the palm of your left hand, close your left fingers and thumb over it, and wrap your right fingers around your left fist. (This second hand position will look like a yin/yang symbol when you look at the sides of the hands.) You can also lay your hands palms up on your thighs.

It is very important in Taoist meditation to keep the spine erect and straight, not as if you were standing at attention, but as if there were a string pulling you up from the top of your head, from the bai hui point at the center of the crown; your chin is slightly pulled in, to elongate the neck. This way the energy coming up the du mai channel, which runs up the back of the spine, can flow evenly and smoothly.

It is important not to slump or fidget while practicing the Tao meditation techniques, but it is equally important not to hold yourself too stiffly.

There is no need to be rigid or dogmatic about posture. The idea is to feel balanced and stable. Deep relaxation is imperative, but you don't want to be so relaxed that you topple over to one side or the other; neither do you want to sit too stiffly and end up with a sore back.

Correct relaxation is not collapse. It is an energetic, dynamic type of relaxation in which your muscles, tendons, organs, and nervous system get a chance to refresh and re-energize themselves. Many people, if they allow themselves to totally relax, find themselves falling asleep or nodding out. It is very important to reach a state of dynamic relaxation for Taoist meditation or any other type of chi gong practice to be truly effective. There is a great difference between relaxing and going limp.

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Watch a cat sometime. Notice how she sits or lies with eyes half-closed or closed, completely relaxed, seemingly deeply asleep. But let a squirrel or bird come anywhere in her vicinity, and she's up like a shot. She has been engaged in a deeply relaxed meditative state yet is able to awaken with no effort and can move with great speed and agility at a moment's notice. That is the type of dynamic relaxation we want to cultivate in Taoist meditation.

Preparation of the Breath: Proper Breathing Techniques

After mastering sitting still and keeping the spine erect, the next step is mastering Taoist breathing. Breathing is something most people feel they can do very well already, but actually, most people don't do a very good job of breathing at all. They breathe mostly from the upper part of the chest and so don't utilize their actual lung power to the fullest.

There is a very large muscle right above our abdominal cavity called the diaphragm, which is shaped like a dome. It can affect the esophagus, the aorta, and the vagus nerve.

When we breathe correctly in Taoist Meditation — from the belly, filling our lungs from the bottom up — we also work that diaphragm muscle, massaging our digestive organs and promoting the flow of blood and lymph to that region. Also, by breathing slowly and deeply, we are better able to arrive at a sense of peacefulness and centeredness. Thus, by simply breathing correctly we can obtain peacefulness and a sense of groundedness and centeredness, as well as promote better digestion and respiration.

Probably the most basic form of breathing in the Tao meditation techniques or other chi gong practices is what is called natural breathing or prenatal breathing. The idea is to breathe into the belly or the lower dantian as if we were babies breathing in our mother's womb — not through our lungs but through our umbilical cord. When we breathe in, our abdomen expands; when we exhale, our abdomen contracts. All Taoist breathing is done through the nose, which is specifically designed to warm and filter the air before it gets to our lungs.

This is a very calming type of Taoist breathing. If you practice breathing in this way for even fifteen minutes a day, you will eventually begin breathing this way all of the time, even when you are sleeping, and the benefits will be enormous.

We are all familiar with the “flight or fight” feeling we get when we are alarmed or in shock. What happens to our breath during these times? It pretty much stops or becomes very shallow. If, when we find ourselves in a stressful situation, we pause for a moment to take a few really slow and deep breaths, it can often clear our mind and quiet our nervous system, helping us to better handle the situation.

Extensive literature in the Taoist canon describes various breathing practices, some extremely difficult and requiring the guidance of a teacher. But for basic Taoist meditation practices, such as sitting or even tai chi, the natural Tao breath technique is sufficient. Practice it daily, and you will be amazed at the sublime effects this simple practice can produce.

Preparation of the Energy Body: Cultivating Healing Qi Energy and Other Details

Have you seen statues of the Buddha, the Awakened One, sitting in meditation? Did you notice the little half smile on his face? He's not sitting there like a lump of wood, solemn and stiff. We need to sit with that same spirit of joy and openness. One of the things I remember most about my first tai chi teacher, David Cheng, was the warm smile he held all through his practice. In Taoism, we believe that it's quite all right to enjoy our practices, that spiritual work can be enjoyable! So relax those facial muscles, and let a small smile play about your lips as you sit. Remember, it takes a lot more muscles to frown than it does to smile.

Energy in the body travels along very specific pathways. Two of the main pathways are the du mai and the ren mai. The du mai runs up the back of the body, and the ren mai runs down the front of the body. The place where they meet is in the upper and lower palate in the mouth. In Taoist meditation, as in all qi gong exercises, we want to connect those two pathways by placing the tongue lightly upon the upper palate. This connects the two pathways, much like completing an electrical circuit. When these pathways are linked, the chi can circulate in an efficient manner.

Placing the tongue on the palate also produces greater amounts of saliva. Taoist meditators believe saliva is a precious substance, and it is often called such fanciful names as “golden dew.” Saliva contains proteins, hormones, and other substances that have digestive and antibacterial functions. It is not a nasty waste product, but a vital, healthful substance that we can use for our own benefit.

It is believed that Taoist breathing fills our saliva with chi, which we can then swallow down into our internal organs. Whenever we have accumulated a good amount of saliva, we should swallow it forcefully, imagining that it is traveling all the way into our lower dantian, our field of elixir. There are certain practices where you roll the tongue around the inside of the mouth in order to accumulate a

good amount of saliva and then separate the mouthful of saliva into three parts and swallow them each separately, sometimes moving them down to each side of the abdomen and then to the center.

1. The Fundamental Daoist Meditation Practice

Many people find that closing their eyes helps them shut out extraneous distraction from the outside world. The danger is that you may be tempted to zone out or even fall asleep. Taoist meditation is not about going into a trance or falling asleep. Instead, it is a form of dynamic interaction between our outer and inner selves. If closing your eyes leads to less internal focus rather than more, instead keep them in a half-closed position and let your gaze become unfocused.

1. Sit in a comfortable position on a cushion or chair, or lie comfortably on the floor or a bed. Relax completely, from the top of your head to the bottoms of your feet. Forget that you're practicing Taoist meditation. Feel each part of your body relax as you slowly pan your attention down your head, face, neck, shoulders, upper chest, upper arms, lower arms, hands, fingers, abdomen, groin, thighs, upper legs, knees, lower legs, feet, and toes.

2. Breathe slowly and deeply through your nose, the tip of your tongue resting on the top palate of your mouth. As you breathe in, breathe in bright light or healing chi. Let it fill your entire body, going deep within your body and psyche, flowing into all the dark and pain-filled areas of your body and psyche.

3. As you breathe out, allow all the pain, sickness, or stress to leave your body, like a dark smoke or mist.

4. With your inner eye, watch that mist fade off into the air.

5. Maintain your Taoist meditation breathing; slow and deep. Keep allowing your body to fill with healing, relaxing light and let all the pain, disease, sorrow, and stress leave you. Do this for ten to twenty minutes — or longer, if need be.

6. When you feel done, rub your palms together thirty-six times and then rub your hands up and down your face at least three times. Then open your eyes and re-enter the world around you, renewed and relaxed.

You can do this Daoist meditation whenever you feel the need to recharge or detoxify your system, though if you do it at night, be sure to direct the energy to your lower abdomen and not into your head when you finish, or you may have trouble sleeping.

How to Tame The Mind

Many people find it very difficult to enter a deep state of meditation because their mind is so full of thoughts, which lead to other thoughts, which lead to others, and so on and on. It can be helpful to count your breaths from one to ten, concentrating fully on each count. Then, once you reach ten, go back and start over again. In the beginning it is often difficult to count much past ten without the thoughts starting up again, but with time, Taoist meditation will become easier. In fact, it is just about impossible to completely still the mind. But even a few moments of deep meditation can have great effects on your mind-body system.

Unlike some other forms of meditation, which are solely for the purpose of quieting the mind, Daoist meditation seeks to quiet the mind so that it will be out of the way and the chi can move in its own fashion. Daoist meditation masters created moving meditation forms, such as tai chi, that allow people to move in a slow and flowing meditative state, which, in turn, allows the chi in their bodies to move on its own. Tai chi is often called "stillness within movement." In still sitting, there is a "movement within stillness." This inner movement is the healing, vitalizing chi moving deep within the three dantians, opening energy pathways as well as spiritual centers. It is also how we find our deep connection with the eternal. The more we dwell within that state in meditation, the easier it is for it to carry over into the rest of our lives.

All Taoist meditation techniques are about refining our energy, our chi, and our spirit, or shen. This refinement process has many levels — psychological, emotional, and spiritual. It is also concerned with the internal process of refining our jing, or fundamental energy, into chi, then refining that into pure spiritual energy, or shen, and then transforming that back into Tao. It is a slow process, taking many years of serious practice to fully accomplish. But there are many helpful results that occur along the way, making the practice itself a rewarding and educational process.

In Taoist meditation techniques it is said that “chi follows yi,” or chi follows the mind. It is an ancient and well-known fact that we can lead energy the tao of intimacy and ecstasy in our body with our minds. There is even a relatively new branch of Western medicine called psychoneuroimmunology, which means basically the same thing. For example, patients with tumors are taught to send little white knights or Pac-Man-type creatures to defeat or eat up the rampaging cancer cells in their body, often to great effect.

2. Deep Stillness Practice

If we allow ourselves to be knocked off our emotional or psychological center too easily, we will have a difficult time adjusting to the ups and downs that happen even in the most harmonious relationships. This Taoist technique can help us find our still center in the midst of activity. Then if in our relationship life we are knocked off our center, we have a way to find it again.

1. First, sit on a cushion high enough and firm enough to support your lower back, or sit on the front part of a chair with your feet planted firmly on the floor. It is extremely important to keep your spine erect yet not stiff. Never slump on your cushion or chair.

2. Next, bounce around for a moment, letting the unprocessed energy of the day settle down in your body. Then exhale deeply and suddenly, emptying your lungs fully. Take three deep breaths, then either close your eyes or keep them unfocused in a halfclosed position. Relax your shoulders, and begin your Taoist breathing: deep and slow, from the belly. Place the tip of your tongue on your upper palate, and relax your face into a small smile.

3. Place your mind, or your attention, on your lower dantian, in your lower abdomen. Allow yourself to feel your breath, your chi, flowing into your dantian and then back out again in a slow, rhythmic way. Feel yourself fill up with good, clean, healing chi and then feel yourself exhale all the old, unclean, used up chi. Just relax and let this rhythmic exchange happen by itself. Have no effort, no tension, no desire, no agenda, no goal. Just let yourself be carried on the wings of energy and of Tao itself. Let yourself sink deeply into the still, quiet depths of your own being.

4. You may experience important insights or ideas at this time. It is fine to have a piece of paper and a pen handy to briefly write them down, but then continue with the Taoist stillness techniques.

5. When your time is up or you feel that your sense of inner quietude is beginning to dissolve, bring your palms in front of you and rub them together briskly thirty-six times. Place them over your eyes, inhaling the warmth of your palms deep into your eyes and brain. Then rub them gently or briskly up and down over your face three times.

6. When you are finished with your Taoist meditation, sit for a moment or so with your palms placed over your lower dantian, below your navel. Let the warmth of your palms enter your dantian and store up the good warm, healing chi there.

Coming Out of the Meditation

Be careful how you re-enter the world after deep Daoist meditation. Try not to jump right into your workaday world immediately. Take at least three to five minutes to gather your energy. If you can, sit down and drink a cup of tea, or do some gentle stretching. Avoid talking with other people too soon. You will be in a heightened and extremely sensitive state at this time; if you plunge too quickly into your everyday life or if you encounter a tense situation or energy exchange with someone else, you will feel it very deeply and be easily knocked off balance. So take it easy with yourself, like the cat

who stretches fully and yawns deeply a few times before slowly entering the outer world on her own terms.

3. Going Deeper: Intuitive Awareness Practice

Taoist meditation is designed for building vital energy and then circulating that within the body. Much of what we know today as the meridian system, which is used in Chinese medicine and chi gong practice, was mapped by those inner astronauts, the ancient Taoists, who while sitting in deep meditation, were able to track how and where energy moved in their bodies. When I was a kid, I had a model called the Visible Man; it was a human body with clear skin, which enabled me to see all the inner organs. The ancient Taoists had their own form of Visible Man because they were able to open, with their inner vision, windows into their own bodies and see how they worked, all without the aid of dissection.

Lao Tzu says that:

*“Without going out your door,
you may know everything under heaven.
Without looking out the window,
you can see the Tao of heaven.”*
(Chapter 47)

Using our inner vision, we are better able to see our true path in life, to travel through the wilds of our emotional landscape, and to traverse the deep rivers and ravines of our inner being and arrive back home, back at our eternal source, back at Tao.

We can also utilize the power of quietude and stillness in Daoist meditation to hear the inspiration and guidance of our higher self or our guardian or helping spirits. Taoists, like Native Americans and many other peoples, believe that we are surrounded by helpful spirit guides at all times, though these spirits are very hard to hear above the usual symphony of noise that plays in our heads most of the time. We need to become quiet inside in order to hear the “still, small voice within” and benefit from the guidance we receive. Under Golden Pond Meditation Tao may be likened to a great pool of still water, deep, dark, and eternally calm. It is in this great pool that each one of us is born, lives out our lives, and returns to after death. In truth, we never leave it.

1. To start your Taoist meditation, picture yourself, then, as a little frog, sitting quietly on a lily pad, which floats gently on the surface of this pond. It is a bright, hot day, and the sounds of the world are loud and cacophonous. Planes fly overhead, cars whoosh by, children play, and adults argue around your pond.

2. After listening to the barrage of noise for long enough, you gently plop yourself over the edge of the lily pad and allow yourself to sink into the depths of the pond.

3. Down and down you go, effortlessly sinking ever deeper into the warm, dark depth of the pond. Down through the layers you go, past darting fish and lumbering turtles. Past the gracefully waving arms of underwater plants you go, like a little weighted doll, until at last you sink to the bottom.

4. At first it is very muddy, as your presence churns up the silt and sediment on the bottom of the pond. You can't really see anything, and outer sounds are indistinct. You can only sit, listening to the quiet thump of your heart. The rush of the world is far above you now and doesn't affect you anymore. You feel the smooth current of the water dancing all around you.

4. Then slowly, as the silt and mud sink back down to the bottom and the water gradually clears, you can, perhaps for the first time, see clearly everything surrounding you. The water is warm and soothing. You sit very still, enveloped in this great soothing, motherly world of water. You breathe slowly and deeply, drawing the healing water into your belly, remembering your Taoist meditation breathing techniques. Your breath slows down until you yourself are breathed, the rhythm of breath

itself taking over. Your heartbeat slows down also, matching your breath, matching the rhythm of nature, of Tao.

5. All worldly cares slip away as you are enfolded into a vast and limitless world where you as an individual are no longer important. The small self you have clung to all your life recedes into a much grander sense of Self, of connection to something larger and more eternal. The little pond you sit in expands outward to become a great sea of chi, of life.

6. You sit here, suspended effortlessly, eternally present in an eternal moment of clarity and wisdom.

7. After a time, you release a little bubble of chi into the water and begin your ascent back into the world.

8. You float up slowly through the water all the way back to the surface, where you jump back onto your lily pad, renewed, refreshed, and ready to begin your life again.

“Why is this important?” you may ask. What does Taoist meditation have to do with sex and relationship? The answer is that if you cannot find the stillness within your being, you will not be able to connect in a deep way with another. If you are not in touch with the deepest part of you, how can you hope to understand the deepest part of someone else?

It is by Taoist meditation, contemplation, exploration, and the willingness to delve deeply into your own psyche and inner knowing that you will find the wisdom and clarity to go forth into the world of sacred union. As Chuang Tzu reminds us, “We cannot see our reflection in running water, but only in still water. Only a person who has attained inner stillness is able to still the minds of others.”

This article on Taoist meditation is excerpted with permission from [The Tao of Intimacy and Ecstasy by Solala Towler.](#)

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